



# **Advancing Art Libraries and Curated Web Archives**

National Forum Report

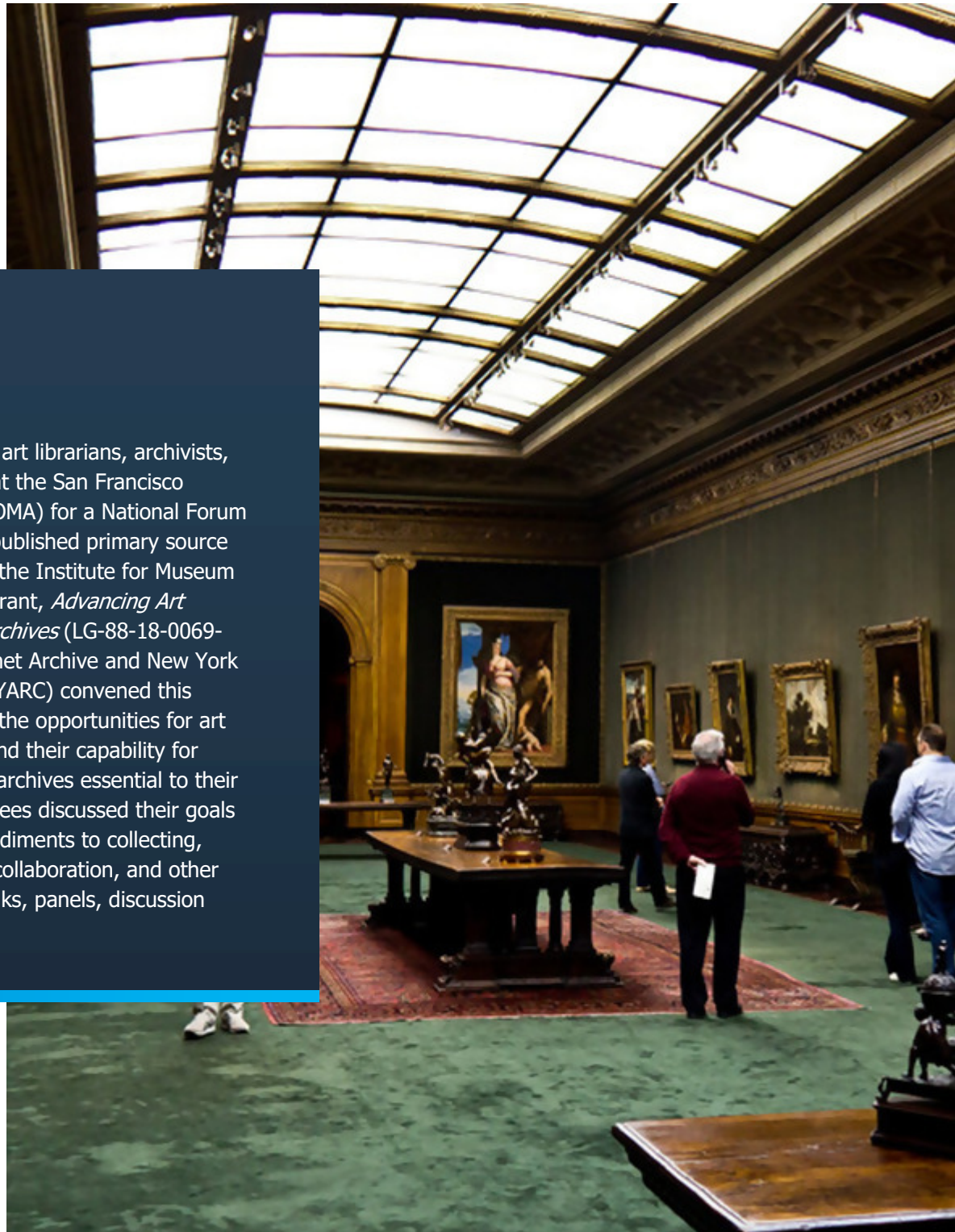
*April 23, 2020*





## Introduction

On February 11-12, 2019, 51 art librarians, archivists, and technologists<sup>1</sup> gathered at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA) for a National Forum on curating archives of web-published primary source materials. With support from the Institute for Museum and Library Services (IMLS) grant, *Advancing Art Libraries and Curated Web Archives* (LG-88-18-0069-18),<sup>2</sup> partners from the Internet Archive and New York Art Resources Consortium (NYARC) convened this gathering in order to explore the opportunities for art and museum libraries to extend their capability for curating and preserving web archives essential to their research areas. Forum attendees discussed their goals for supporting research, impediments to collecting, desires for inter-institutional collaboration, and other topics across a program of talks, panels, discussion groups, and workshops.



<sup>1</sup> See Appendix A for a list of institutions represented

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.ims.gov/grants/awarded/lq-88-18-0069-18>

An initial day-long symposium, informed by the project team's background research,<sup>3 4</sup> surfaced the most important, most common issues among the representatives of art and museum libraries in attendance and their diverse levels of experience with web archiving. Subsequent half-day workshops provided further training and discussion on the potential for group-curated collections and cooperative models for sustaining shared collections. A focus group of key stakeholders from this forum reconvened on April 26, 2019, at the Frick Art Reference Library in New York to distill these experiences into a roadmap for expanding collaborative web archiving among art and museum libraries. Building on the input and feedback from forum participants, the Internet Archive and NYARC will conduct further meetings and make a public report of the next possible steps for the community as part of the reporting on the National Forum and its related work.



## Events

### *Symposium*

National Forum participants convened for a daylong symposium at SFMOMA on February 11, 2019 in order to learn one another's goals for, experiences with, and questions about web archives. They were greeted by SFMOMA's Head of Library and Archives, David Senior, and introduced to the the forum goals and related grant-funded activities from project team members Lori Donovan (Senior Program Manager, Internet Archive) and Deborah Kempe (Chief, Collections Management & Access, Frick Art Reference Library). Artist and author Jenny Odell<sup>1</sup> kicked off the event with a keynote address that summarized her artistic practice of contextualizing and de-contextualizing the items in archival collections – covering themes of description, outreach, and access. Further programmed events throughout the day progressively shared individual institutional experiences and collecting strategies as they inform or overlap with web archiving principles and practices.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>3</sup> *Advancing Art Libraries and Curated Web Archives: A Literature Review*, <https://archive.org/details/AALCWALiteratureReview>

<sup>4</sup> *Advancing Art Libraries and Curated Web Archives: A Community Survey*, <https://archive.org/details/AALCWACommunitySurvey>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.jennyodell.com/>

<sup>6</sup> See Appendix B for the National Forum's symposium program

The morning's program included two curated discussion panels with invited participants. The first of these addressed policies, resources, and administrative buy-in for institutions embarking on new digital collecting and preservation projects generally. Representatives discussed the Baltimore Museum of Art's published guidance on digital preservation,<sup>7</sup> the Cleveland Museum of Art's opening of online access to its digital reproductions,<sup>8</sup> and the Museum of Modern Art's digital portal to institutional exhibition history.<sup>9</sup> The projects represent a broad spectrum of responsibilities familiar to different participants, however converged most strongly on the theme of internal, institutional stakeholder support from project inception to long-term management and preservation.

A second panel examined the lessons learned by stewards of mature web archiving programs within art and museum libraries. Collecting policies, staffing models, internal and external documentation, and other program management areas were explicated by the Clark Art Institute,<sup>10</sup> Ivy Plus Libraries,<sup>11</sup> and University of Pennsylvania's Fisher Fine Arts Library. Panelists emphasized the importance of documentation, appraisal guidelines, and rigorous management of the scope and scale of web collecting efforts. Participants took these lessons into an afternoon of rotating discussion groups on key themes that emerged from the project team's initial research:

- *Collaborative collection development.* This group emphasized the importance of being informed and in-touch with artists, galleries, events, and communities in order to make acquisitions strategically and within available resources and capacities. Documentation strategy and post-custodial models for hosting web archives were raised as options for organizations with few resources, technical or staff-wise, of their own. At all scales, existing "artist files" collections were seen as a natural place to extend collecting to new, born-digital and web-published formats.
- *Outreach to creators.* This group also discussed personal connections between collectors and their communities – knowing when and why to archive a gallery site or social media feed, for instance, through knowledge of the community or persons with ownership authority or intellectual property interests; this contrasts with library collecting traditions for published materials like books and serials. The agency of creators on the web was identified as important to considerations of acquisition modes and access standards. Artists, exhibitors, and event organizers were each thought of as creators in this context. Collaborative selection approaches were discussed here in terms of regionally or thematically specific collection development networks linked through mutual acquisition interests, cooperative structures, or centralized resource sharing.
- *Polymaking and resource allocation.* In this group, participants discussed engaging internal stakeholders by conceptualizing web archiving risks and opportunities. Natural allies among stakeholders included curatorial, digital media, and information technology staffs. Tying collecting mandates in new media formats to core institutional missions was underlined as necessary and effective towards budgeting. However, there was agreement that clearly identifying success from existing web archiving programs were also necessary to demystify processes and requirements for internal stakeholders. Creative or external funding opportunities proposed included grants, public funds for public arts institutions and projects, and philanthropic funding for projects with naming potential.
- *Digital preservation and storage.* Internal stakeholders were identified as helpful allies towards advancing a new and otherwise resource-intensive institutional responsibility. Scaling storage and preservation capacities to meet the demands of web archiving activities was an essential need to prioritize, especially to assuage fears or fatigue around the risks associated with ongoing costs. Otherwise, participants in this conversation conceded that it is difficult to make digital storage and preservation compete with myriad other priorities across an organization.

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/pdfplus/10.1086/691378>

<sup>8</sup> <https://clevelandart.org/open-access>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/history/>

<sup>10</sup> <https://cdm16245.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p16245coll2>

<sup>11</sup> [https://library.columbia.edu/collections/web-archives/Ivy\\_Plus\\_Libraries.html](https://library.columbia.edu/collections/web-archives/Ivy_Plus_Libraries.html)





## Workshops

Forum participants reconvened on February 12 to explore collecting strategies and tactics for prospective new collaborative web archives. They reviewed the decisions made by curators about the scopes, management, and preservation plans for web archives, and considered these in the context of NYARC's own case study example. In small groups of 5-6 participants each, and with the guidance of the project team and a written exercise,<sup>12</sup> they then outlined the purposes, stakeholders, curatorial strategies, and management structures for web archives that reflect their shared collecting goals.

### **Example collections proposed by these working groups included:**

- Women artists
- Contemporary African-American artists and print cultures
- International zines
- Regional architecture firms

### **Themes that emerged most often across all groups included:**

- Models for focusing collection development on local/regional/thematic strengths while contributing to a larger, networked, global centralized collection
- Diversifying the art historical record and filling gaps/erasures via direct outreach to subjects
- Web archiving as a service to artists, designers, architects, and local arts communities
- Increasing the discoverability of collected resources

<sup>12</sup> See Appendix C for the National Forum workshop's group exercise guide

## Evaluations

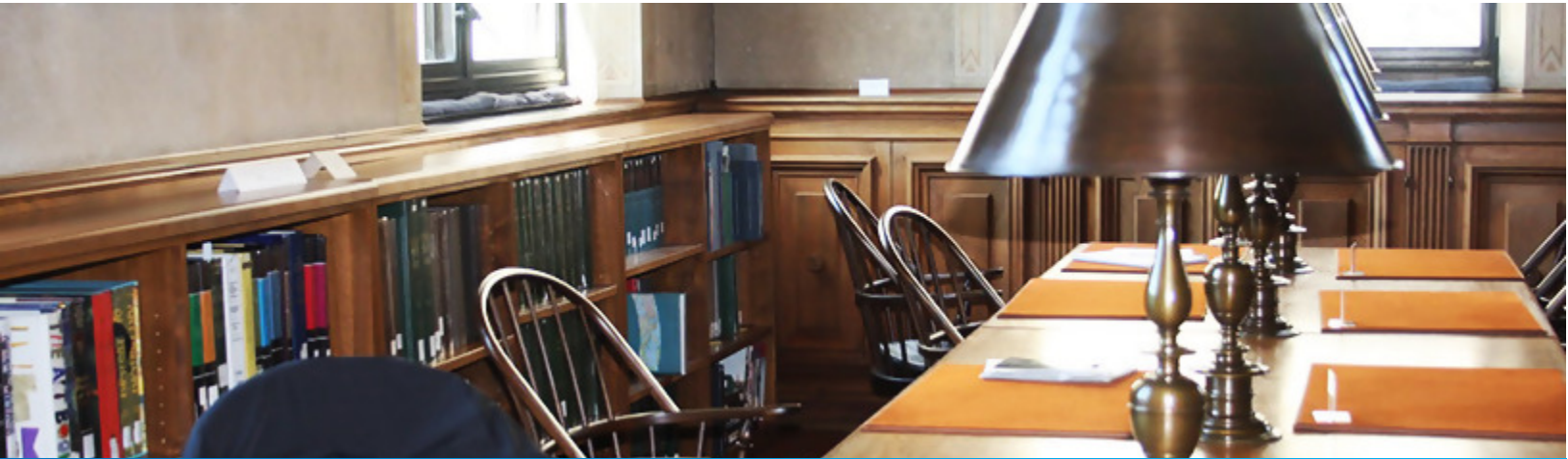
National Forum attendees were asked to complete a short survey in order to evaluate their experiences and benchmark their web archiving interests and limitations moving forward. The survey was delivered by email and conducted on the SurveyMonkey platform from March 12-22, 2019. 29 out of 46 attendees completed the survey.

Attendees rated the forum program's constructiveness highly on a traditional Likert scale from 1 (low) to 5 (high). The weighted average result was 4.45; 27 of 29 attendees assigned a 4 or 5 rating. Asked if their institutions would consider participating in an exploratory collaborative web archiving cohort if some form of funding were provided, 22 attendees responded that they would, 7 that they might or did not know, and none that they would not. 20 respondents volunteered their contact information for direct updates on next steps for this option.

Respondents also revisited questions about web archiving interests first posed in the project team's *Community Survey*. Their responses highlighted increased interest coming out of the National Forum in collection development networks and access models, and reiterated the limitations imposed by current budget and staffing levels.



<sup>1</sup> See Appendix C for the National Forum workshop's group exercise guide



Survey respondents' ranking of the project team's working areas by "their importance to your future engagement with web archives":

1. Collection development tools and networks (Weighted average score: 4.21)
2. Discovery and access models (3.97)
3. Long-term storage and preservation (3.72)
4. Shared subscription service options (3.38)
5. Training or educational resources (2.97)
6. Technical development (2.76)

And ranking of barriers by "their impact on your ability to create web archives moving forward":

1. Lack of staff (Weighted average score: 5.14)
2. Insufficient budget (5.10)
3. Lack of discoverability tools for web archives (4.00)
4. Lack of administrative support (3.93)
5. Lack of skills among existing staff (3.90)
6. Lack of access to web archiving tools (3.31)
7. Lack of demonstrated usefulness of web archives (2.62)

## Stakeholder meetings

The project team convened a focus group of stakeholder participants from nine of the forum's participating organizations on April 26, 2019. This group sought to focus the priorities and problems articulated in the above discussions into a plan for advancing curated web archives among art and museum libraries going forward. The group brainstormed their highest shared goals for web archives at their own institutions and considered these against the relative advantages and disadvantages of precedent collaboration models like the collecting programs at NYARC, the Ivy Plus Libraries, and the Community Webs cohort of public libraries.<sup>13</sup> They agreed that there was an important opportunity to leverage web archives for outreach to communities under-represented in their institutions' distinctive regional or subject-specific collections and that their joint participation in the Art Libraries Society of North America (ARLIS/NA) professional association, of which most are members, offered similar opportunities.



Consensus was also reached that the most likely avenue to contribute to curated web archives would be by creating new acquisition lines for web-published material within existing collection budgets, similar to how database or periodical subscriptions are budgeted in many libraries. This model could more easily support a centralized service for harvesting, managing, and preserving the materials, and participants in a subscriber network could then subsidize their own specialist collecting areas while also supporting a larger pool of funding and archived resources through centralized infrastructure, discovery, and access. The Internet Archive and NYARC project team resolved to draft a description of such a model for consideration and feedback outlining potential costs, resource sharing scenarios, participation, governance, management, and implementation timelines.

<sup>13</sup> <https://communitywebs.archive-it.org/>

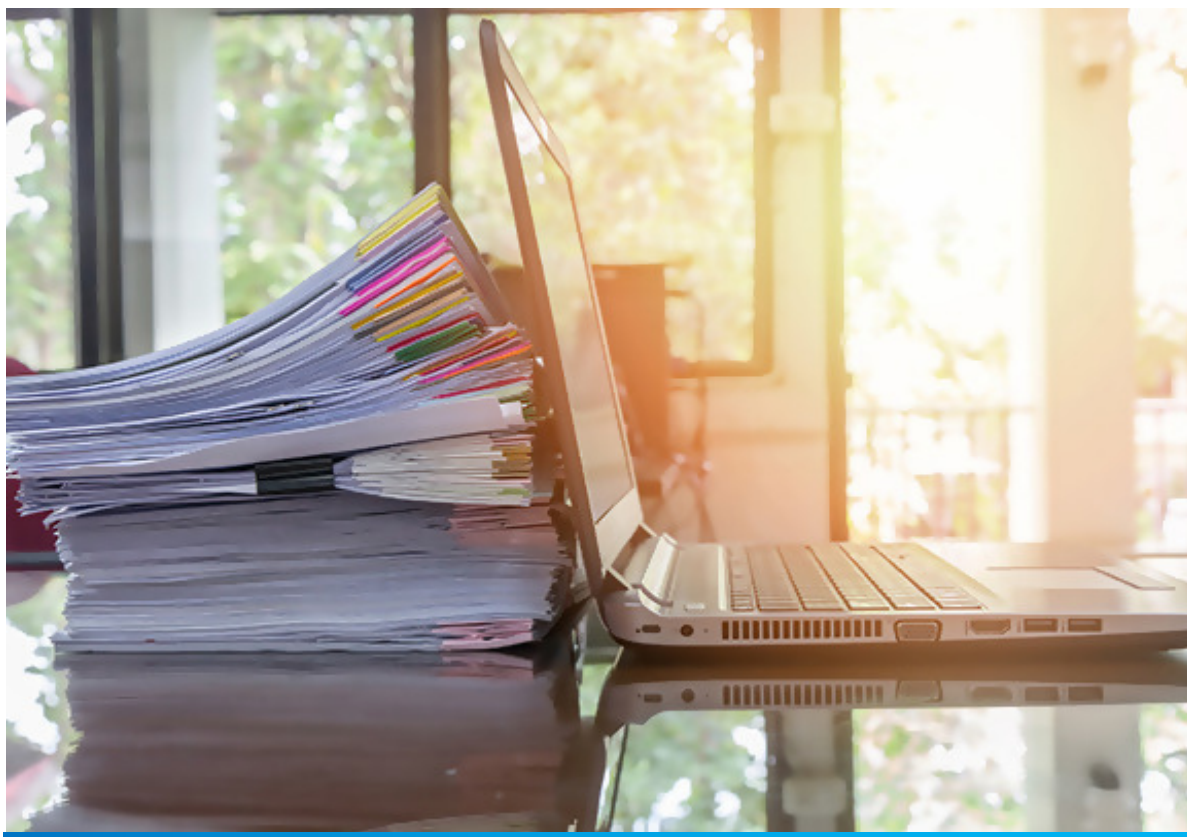


Project leads and stakeholders reconvened at the Getty Research Institute in Los Angeles on March 3, 2020, to refine the model for a new service community. The Internet Archive was identified as an appropriate host for services to the community. An initial goal of 15-20 library partners was made in order to sustain acquisition, data storage and preservation service costs for web archives with collecting budgets. Institutional archiving, quality assurance, and custom technical development were enumerated as additional services for budgets that can sustain them.

With consensus met on a model, the group resolved to begin seeking participants via conference presentations, open webinars and targeted outreach. It was agreed that a successful first presentation would require the leads to provide:

- List of participating libraries
- Wireframe mock-ups for a unified patron access point
- Preservation and scholarly use cases
- Differentiation from existing services like Archive-It and the Wayback Machine
- Subscription/licensing information at multiple price points
- Draft service agreement language





## Findings

The project team at the Internet Archive and NYARC will base its next steps upon many conclusions gleaned from the above National Forum research and events. These include:

- Art and museum libraries are interested in collaborating on curated web archives and interested in community models for shared infrastructure.
- Art and museum libraries can articulate curatorial priorities and specific acquisition goals for web archiving with ease and much cross-institutional agreement.
- Empowered to curate web archives, institutions would address gaps in their areas of special collecting strength, especially in regional distinction and the representation of women artists and artists who identify with minority groups.
- Limited on-site resources like staff and hardware infrastructure impede many art and museum libraries from building and stewarding these collections.
- Art and museum libraries understand and often have relevant experience in the technical processes of web archive acquisition and management, but prefer to centralize these aspects rather than allocate them to new or existing staff within their own organization.
- An affordable model advancing shared web archiving infrastructure and collaboration would provide acquisition, storage, and related technical services to art and museum libraries who would then contribute curatorially and through membership or paid-service subscriptions within existing collecting budgets, thus addressing staff and technical costs while also enabling multiple participation levels and flexible, on-demand services.

# Appendix

## *Appendix A: National Forum participants*

The following organizations were represented at the National Forum, *Advancing Art Libraries and Curated Web Archives*, on February 11-12, 2019, at the SFMOMA:

American Craft Council  
 Art Gallery of Ontario, E.P. Taylor Library and Archives  
 Art Institute of Chicago\*  
 Baltimore Museum of Art\*  
 Brooklyn Museum  
 California African American Museum  
 California College of the Arts  
 California Digital Library  
 Clark Art Institute  
 Cleveland Museum of Art  
 Corning Museum of Glass  
 Emory University Libraries  
 Fashion Institute of Technology-SUNY  
 Frick Art Reference Library of The Frick Collection\*  
 Getty Research Institute\*  
 Guggenheim Museum  
 Harvard University Graduate School of Design  
 Harvard University Fine Arts Library  
 Huntington Library, Art Collections, and Botanical Gardens  
 Indianapolis Museum of Art at Newfields\*  
 Internet Archive\*  
 Ivy Plus Libraries\*  
 Library of Congress  
 Los Angeles County Museum of Art  
 Maryland Institute College of Art, Decker Library  
 The Menil Collection  
 Metropolitan Museum of Art, Watson Library\*  
 Museum of Modern Art  
 Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art\*  
 New Museum  
 New York Public Library, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture\*  
 Philadelphia Museum of Art\*  
 Portland Art Museum  
 Saint Louis Art Museum  
 San Francisco Museum of Modern Art\*  
 Smithsonian Institution  
 Stanford University  
 University of California, Berkeley  
 University of Hawaii, Jean Charlot Collection  
 University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill  
 University of Pennsylvania  
 Whitney Museum of American Art

*\* Denotes additional participation in stakeholder meetings*





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<https://archive-it.org/blog/learn-more/art-libraries/>